

ENSURING SUCCESS FOR CHILDREN WITH INCARCERATED PARENTS

ABOUT THIS SERIES

The area of human services is a long-standing priority for members of the Association of Small Foundations (ASF). According to the ASF 2007-2008 Foundation Operations & Management Report, ASF members gave more than \$620 million to human services in their most recent fiscal year, second only to education. At the core of human services is the well-being of children and families, including children with incarcerated parents. This discussion guide, one in the series Investing in Strategies to Serve Vulnerable Children and Families, is designed to: provide clear and concise information to small foundations on strategies for supporting nonprofits that serve vulnerable children and families; and to share concrete ways that small foundations can invest in creating productive adulthood for vulnerable children.

This discussion guide series is funded by and draws on the experience, learning, and resources of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The Casey Foundation is the largest philanthropy in the U.S. dedicated to improving the lives of vulnerable children and families. The Casey Foundation is driven by its mission to find the most effective solutions that narrow the gap between children growing up in areas of concentrated poverty and their peers. Their work reflects the core belief that children do well when their families are strong and families in supportive communities are able to raise healthy and productive children.

MAKING THE CASE

The Girl Scout meeting opens like any other – with the Pledge of Allegiance and the Girl Scout Pledge, but Girl Scouts of Troop 1500 meet in prison – Hilltop Prison in Gatesville, Texas to be precise. Troop 1500 meets once a month, providing girls ages 5-18 an opportunity to visit their incarcerated mothers on a regular basis and take part in mother/daughter Girl Scout troop meetings. Mothers lead troop meetings and develop skills in leadership, conflict resolution and parenting, all of which are critical to their success in family life and employment after their release. “I don’t know what I would have done without this program,” said a mother serving a three-year sentence for drug possession and driving under the influence. “They come up with some really good ideas of stuff to do together, to open up feelings and to deal with emotions that you’re trying not to show.” The first Girl Scouts Beyond Bars program started in 1992 in Maryland; now there are over 40 troops in 28 states. Troop 1500 in Texas was the subject of a 2005 award-winning documentary of the same name.

The Girl Scouts in Troop 1500 are among more than 1.5 million children in the U.S. who have at least one parent in prison. In addition, an estimated 7 million have a parent under some form of correctional supervision. As one might imagine, incarceration severely limits children’s opportunities to interact with their incarcerated parent, and most importantly, to communicate with the parent. Programs like Girl Scouts Beyond Bars help overcome these limits, addressing both the needs of children and parents.

This discussion guide is focused on strategies for supporting programs and services for children with incarcerated parents. The guide identifies the common issues in this area, suggests ways you can invest in the area, and provides questions for discussion and references to find additional information and resources. Whether you already fund programs and activities that support children with incarcerated parents, or are considering doing so, the guide will spark your thinking – and that of your foundation peers – and deepen your understanding of effective strategies to support nonprofits working with children with incarcerated parents.

DEFINING THE ISSUES

Defining the issues surrounding children with incarcerated parents is easy. However, a few things are clear and compelling:

- Three-quarters of incarcerated women are mothers, and two-thirds have children under the age of 18.
- African-American children are nine times more likely than white children to have a parent in prison and Hispanic children are three times more likely to have a parent in prison.
- About ten percent of children with incarcerated mothers and two percent of children with incarcerated fathers are in foster care.

Even with these compelling statistics, the children of incarcerated parents have historically received little attention, and minimal research has been conducted to examine the connection between imprisoned parents and negative child outcomes. The U.S. criminal justice system has traditionally not been concerned with inmates' familial relationships (the U.S. Department of Justice first started collecting statistics on parents in prison and their children in 1991), and only with the Second Chance Act of 2007 has there been any national-level attention and focus on working to improve the outcomes for families, and in particular for children, who have at some point had a family member imprisoned. Other reasons making it difficult to define the issues include poor communication among prisons and child welfare agencies, lack of data or overlapping databases, and the remaining stigma attached to incarceration, one that extends beyond the imprisoned, affecting both parents and children.

HOW YOU AS A FUNDER CAN ACT

There are many ways that you as a funder can act to support children with incarcerated parents – whether it is funding for research to define the issues more clearly and test service delivery models or funding that supports programs like Girl Scouts Beyond Bars. Look to support organizations that help children and their families stay connected, improve and expand research and practice, and advocate on the issue of children with incarcerated parents. And don't forget that as funder, you can give more than grants.

Helping Children and Their Families Stay Connected

Prisons rarely provide programs and services that help incarcerated parents stay connected to their children, and in cases where these programs and services are organized by prisons, they still lack institutional funding. Foundation funding is critical for such nonprofit programs and services as:

- Parent-Child Visiting Programs – these programs (Girl Scouts Beyond Bars is an example) allow parents to spend extended time with their children within the confines of the institution. The programs may include day-long visits, overnight visits, or child-in-residence programs. These programs typically need funding to help cover the costs of transportation and special activities (arts and crafts, book-reading, cooking) that are part of the visiting program.
- Other Parent-Child Connections Programs – these programs allow children and parents to stay in touch in between visits and when visits are not possible. For example, the Berks County Community Foundation supports *A Mother's Voice* program, in which incarcerated mothers with minor children can read and record a storybook with a brief personal message for each of their children.
- Parenting Classes – these programs help prisoners become better parents and improve outcomes for their children. For example, The *InsideOut Dad* program, developed by the National Fatherhood Initiative, helps inmate dads prepare for reentry into society. The program includes 12 one-hour core sessions on such topics as relationships, fathering, parenting, child development.
- Mentoring for Children – these programs provide children with incarcerated parents additional adult support and guidance. They may be part of parent-child visiting programs, or may be stand-alone programs that match children with incarcerated parents with mentors, such as Big Brother, Big Sister programs.
- Counseling and Support Programs – these programs provide professional counseling in a group therapy setting, as well as informal support programs where children of incarcerated parents can meet other children with incarcerated parents at group meetings, on field trips, or at summer camps.

Improving and Expanding Research and Practice

Many unknowns remain with regard to the relationship between parental incarceration and child outcomes. To address these unknowns and advance knowledge and practice, fund programs that are working to collect reliable, comprehensive data and use that data to test, improve, and expand programs and services. Also support opportunities for researchers and practitioners to participate in professional development, peer learning, and technical assistance, as well as activities that encourage collaborative research, data collection, communications, and cross training among organizations.

Advocacy

While foundations cannot engage in partisan political activity, lobbying, or earmark grants for lobbying purposes, they can fund and engage in advocacy! Here are some ways funders can engage in advocacy on the issue of children with incarcerated parents:

- Provide project support or general operating support to organizations that engage in advocacy work, including public awareness campaigns, on children with incarcerated parents, and lobby for increased funding for the Second Chance Act.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper on the need for your state department of corrections to collect data on children with incarcerated parents (Rhode Island is only state to do this; their effort could serve as a model for other states) or the need for a national clearinghouse for data and information on program and service-delivery strategies.

To learn more about how private foundations *can and cannot* engage in advocacy, see the ASF Primer listed in Resources and Additional Information section below.

Giving More than Grants

Foundations have much to offer beyond their philanthropic funds. A few ways to use all your assets – not just financial resources – include:

- Convening a group of diverse stakeholders, including local corrections agencies as well as community and faith-based organizations to talk about the Second Chance Act and how to work together and coordinate efforts to better facilitate former prisoners' transitions back into society through education, vocational training, and job services; coordinated supervision, including housing, mental, and physical health care; and the development of healthy, safe, and responsible family relations, and in particular parent-child relationships.
- Holding screenings of the documentary *Troop 1500* at your foundation's office – or at the local library or community center.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Read the *Children of Incarcerated Parents: A Bill of Rights* below and take a few minutes to reflect on it. What is your reaction to this bill of rights? Is it important for children with incarcerated parents to have these rights? Why or why not?

Children of Incarcerated Parents: A Bill of Rights

1. I have the right to be kept safe and informed at the time of my parent's arrest.
2. I have the right to be heard when decisions are made about me.
3. I have the right to be considered when decisions are made about my parent.
4. I have the right to be well cared for in my parent's absence.
5. I have the right to speak with, see and touch my parent.
6. I have the right to support as I face my parent's incarceration.
7. I have the right not to be judged, blamed or labeled because my parent is incarcerated.
8. I have the right to a lifelong relationship with my parent.

Source: San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership

2. In light of the *Children of Incarcerated Parents: A Bill of Rights*, what funding strategies do you think would be the most effective ones for your foundation – or other small foundations – to pursue? Why?

3. What non-profits in your community work to ensure success for children with incarcerated parents? Who are some other small foundations and donors in your community that work in this program are? Would a partnership make sense?



Ideas from your discussion (use this space to jot down ideas generated by the discussion):

RESOURCES AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

1. *All Alone in the World: Children of Incarcerated Parents*, Nell Burstein, New Press, 2005
2. "Children and Families With Incarcerated Parents: Exploring Development in the Field and Opportunities for Growth," The Annie E. Casey Foundation (www.aecf.org), January 2008
3. "Broken Bonds: Understanding and Addressing the Needs of Children with Incarcerated Parents," The Urban Institute (www.urban.org), 2008
4. "Film documents scout troop's efforts to break cycle of crime," Amarillo Globe-News, March 18, 2006 (www.amarillo.com/news)
5. "The Girl Scouts help incarcerated mothers and their daughters build strong bonds," Christian Science Monitor, March 5, 2003 (www.csmonitor.com)
6. Family and Corrections Network (www.fcnetwork.org)
7. Family Funders Network (www.familyfunders.org), Issue Briefs on Facilitating the Re-entry of Former Prisoners and Embracing Children with Incarcerated Parents
8. Grantmakers for Children, Youth & Families (www.gycf.org)
9. Girl Scouts Beyond Bars and Bridge Beyond Bars (www.girlscouts.org)
10. National Fatherhood Initiative (www.fatherhood.org)
11. "Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children," U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs (www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/pptmc.pdf), August 2008
12. San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents (www.sfcipp.org)
13. Second Chance Act of 2007 (<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h110-1593>)

OTHER DISCUSSION GUIDES IN THIS SERIES

This discussion guide is one in a series on topics related to investing in strategies to serve vulnerable children and families. For other discussion guides, and for information on hosting an ASF Local Program, please contact ASF toll-free at 888-212-9922 or asf@smallfoundations.org.